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EDITOR RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT CIA INFORMATION EXEMPTION
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The CIA and the American Civil Liberties Union agree that exempting some CIA files from review under the Freedom of Information Act would not deprive the public of significant information, but a Virginia newspaperman is not so sure.

"First, we must place our faith and trust in the CIA to carefully execute its responsibilities in accordance with the statute," Charles S. Rowe, editor and co-publisher of the Fredericksburg (Va.) Free Lance-Star, told a House subcommittee Friday.

"Secondly, we must look to the Congress for stringent oversight to guard the public interest against excesses by the agency," Rowe said.

"The historical record of the CIA, most recently punctuated by the mining of the Nicaraguan harbor, brings each of these premises into serious question," he added.

Rowe, representing the American Newspaper Publishers Association and American Society of Newspaper Editors, told the House Government Operations subcommittee on information that the two groups have "serious reservations" about a bill that would provide the CIA exemption.

The measure has been approved by the House Intelligence Committee but must also pass the Government Operations panel before it is sent to the House floor for action. The Senate approved a similar measure last year.

Rowe said one of the concerns of the newspaper groups is that the bill would give the CIA director the responsibility of determining which files would be covered by the exemption.

"If the CIA does not meet its responsibilities under the Intelligence Oversight Act, can we expect it to respect the parameters of this legislation?" Rowe asked.

Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., chairman of the Intelligence Committee, and several of its members have said they were not kept "fully and currently informed" of the CIA's role in the mining, as required by law.

Charles A. Briggs, executive director of the CIA, told the subcommittee that it takes two to three years for a person making a request for records on CIA operations under the Freedom of Information Act to obtain what "is usually a composite of blacked out words."

"The public derives little or no meaningful information from the fragmentary items or the occasional isolated paragraph which is ultimately released from operational files," Briggs said.

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